

Literature Circles



Reading Skills

- Reading and discussing books
- Connecting with books
- Taking responsibility as readers and constructing meaning together
- Debating and challenging one another
- Making drawings and notes that reflect readers' ideas
- Asking open-ended questions
- Reading aloud of favorite passages
- Revisiting the text constantly
- Proving points and settling differences by using specific passages
- Thinking critically

Overview of the “Literature Circle” Strategy

“Literature Circles” — small groups of students gathered together to discuss a piece of literature in depth — is a teaching method that allows students to become critical thinkers as they engage in ongoing dialogue with a book, in this case *Wish You Well*. Literature circles provide a way for students to engage in critical thinking and reflection as they read, discuss, and respond to the book. Collaboration is at the heart of this approach. In classrooms all across the country, literature circles are helping to create a student-centered learning environment. Through structured discussion and extended written and artistic response, this strategy guides the students to a deeper understanding of what they read. The key aspect of this strategy is the structured use of role sheets (provided on the following pages) as the students learn to discuss and contribute to the group. These sheets can also be used as evaluation tools.

Adapted from Schlick Noe, K.L. and Johnson, N.J. (1999), *Getting started with literature circles*, Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers; and from the Literature Circles Resource Center at <http://fac-staff.seattleu.edu/kschlnoe/LitCircles/>.

Activity for the “Literature Circle” Strategy

1. Select members for the Literature Circles (discussion groups).
2. Assign roles for the members of each circle.
3. Assign reading to be completed by the circles inside or outside of class.
4. Select circle meeting dates.
5. Help students prepare for their roles in their circle.
6. Act as a facilitator for the circles.

Discussion Sheet for Literature Circles

Name: _____

Group: _____

Book: Wish You Well by David Baldacci

Role: _____ Pages: _____

- While you are reading or after you have finished reading, prepare for the circle meeting by assuming the identity of one of the strategists below and completing and then presenting your strategy:
 1. **Clarifier:** Your job is to find 5 words or concepts that are important to the story, list and explain each word/concept, and write down its page number.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
 2. **Summarizer:** Your job is to prepare a brief summary of the book. You want to convey how the characters are influenced by the various events and how the main conflict contributes to the resolution.

Key Events:

Summary:
 3. **Questioner:** Your job is to develop a list of four questions about this book that your circle might discuss. Your task is to help circle members discuss the big ideas in the book and share their reactions. Center your questions on the 5 Ws + How. Be prepared to read aloud key passages that present the answers. List page numbers.

Question 1:

Answer

Question 2:

Answer

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Question 3:

Answer

Question 4:

Answer

4. **Predictor:** Your job is to predict what you think will happen next in this story. After each prediction defend your reasoning.

Based on what I have read, I predict that the following events will happen:

1.

Why:

2.

Why:

3.

Why:

Literature Circles Role Sheet

Summarizer

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Meeting Date _____ Assignment: Pages _____ to _____

Summarizer: Your job is to prepare a brief summary of today's reading. Your group discussion will start with your 1–2 minute statement that covers the key points, main highlights, and general idea of today's reading assignment.

Summary:

Key Points:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Connections: What did today's reading remind you of?

Literature Circles Role Sheet

Discussion Director

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Meeting Date _____ Assignment: Pages _____ to _____

Discussion Director: Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about this part of the book. Don't worry about the small details; your task is to help people talk over the big ideas in the reading and share their reactions. Usually the best discussion questions come from your own thoughts, feelings, and concerns as you read. You can list them below during or after your reading. You may also use some of the general questions below to develop topics for your group.

Possible discussion questions or topics for today

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Sample questions

- What was going through your mind while you read this?
- How did you feel while reading this part of the book?
- What was discussed in this section of the book?
- Can someone summarize briefly?
- Did today's reading remind you of any real-life experiences?
- What questions did you have when you finished this section?
- Did anything in this section of the book surprise you?
- What are the one or two most important ideas?
- What are some things you think will be talked about next.

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow: _____

Assignment for tomorrow: Pages _____ to _____

Literature Circles Role Sheet

Investigator*

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Meeting Date _____ Assignment: Pages _____ to _____

Investigator: Your job is to dig up some background information on any topic related to your book. This might include

- the geography, weather, culture, or history of the book's setting
- information about the author — her/his life and other works
- information about the time period portrayed in the book
- pictures, objects, or materials that illustrate elements of the book
- the history and derivation of words or names used in the book
- music that reflects the book or its time.

This is *not* a formal research report. The idea is to find bits of information or material that helps your group better understand the book. Investigate something that really interests you — something that struck you as puzzling or curious while you were reading.

Sources for information

- the introduction, preface, or "about the author" section of the book
- library books and magazines
- on-line computer search or encyclopedia
- interviews with people who know the topic
- other novels, nonfiction, or textbooks you've read

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow: _____

Assignment for tomorrow: Pages _____ to _____

* Adapted from *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse Publishers: York, Maine, 1994. Published in Canada by Pembroke Publishers, Markham, Ontario, 1994).

Literature Circles Role Sheet

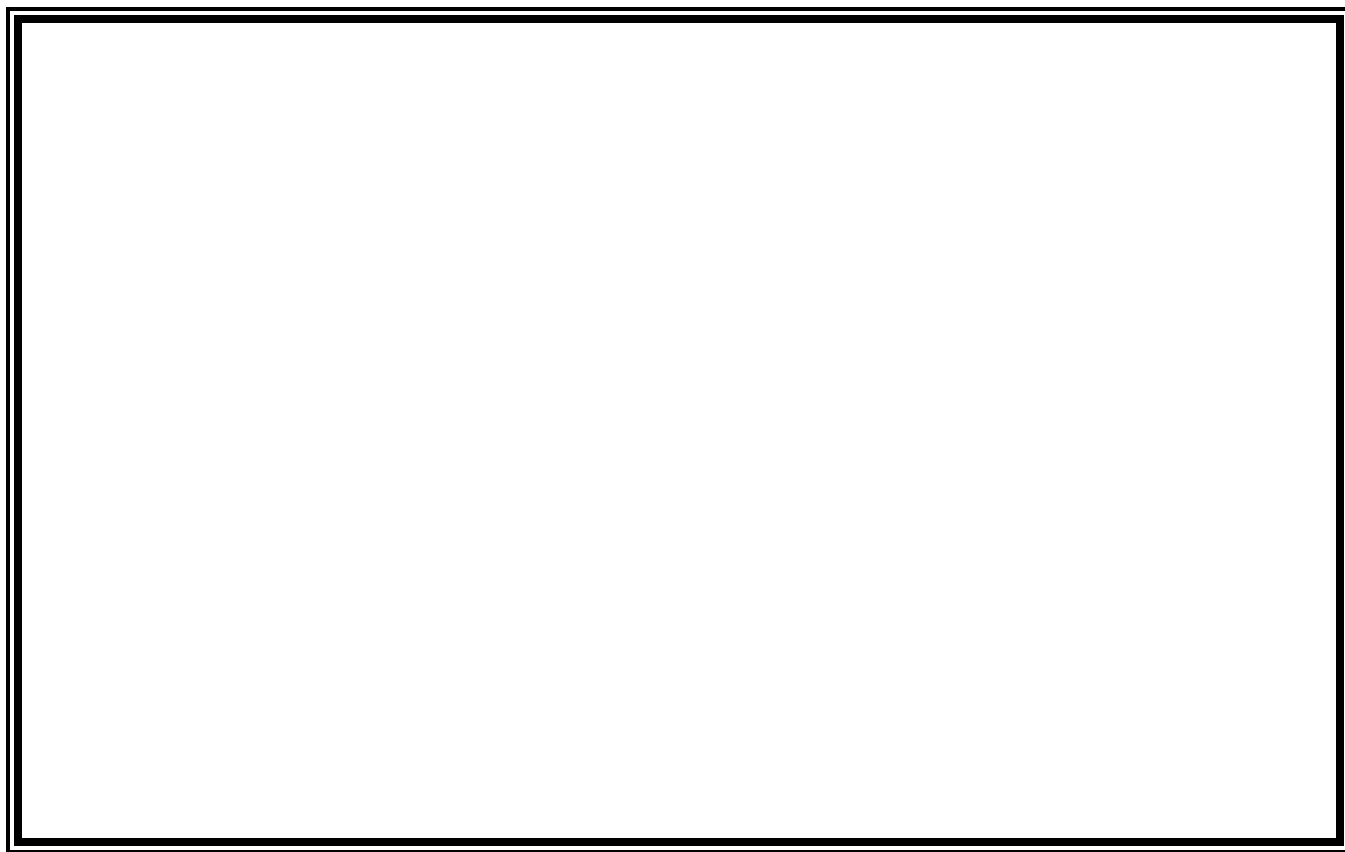
Illustrator*

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Meeting Date _____ Assignment: Pages _____ to _____

Illustrator: Your job is to draw some kind of picture related to the reading. It can be a sketch, cartoon, diagram, flow chart, or stick figure scene. You can draw a picture of something that is discussed specifically in your book, something that the reading reminded you of, or a picture that conveys any idea or feeling you got from the reading. Any kind of drawing or graphic is okay. You can even label things with words if that helps. Make your drawing on this paper. If you need more room, use the back.



Connections: What did today's reading remind you of?

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Literature Circles Role Sheet

Connector*

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Meeting Date _____ Assignment: Pages _____ to _____

Connector: Your job is to find connections between the book your group is reading and the world outside. This means connecting the reading to your own life, happenings at school or in the community, similar events at other times and places, or other people or problems that this book brings to mind. You might also see connections between this book and other writings on the same topic or other writings by the same author. There are no right answers here. Whatever the reading connects *you* with is worth sharing!

Some connections I found between this reading and other people, places, events, authors:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow: _____

Assignment for tomorrow: Pages _____ to _____

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Literature Circles Role Sheet

Travel Tracer*

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Meeting Date _____ Assignment: Pages _____ to _____

Travel Tracer: When you are reading a book in which characters move around often and the scene changes frequently, it is important for everyone in your group to know *where* things are happening and how the setting may have changed. So that's your job: to track carefully where the action takes place during today's reading. Describe each setting in detail, either in words or with an action map or diagram you can show to your group. You may use the back of this sheet or another sheet. Be sure to give the page locations where the scene is described.

Describe or sketch the setting

- **where today's action begins**

Page where it is described _____

- **where today's key events happen**

Page where it is described _____

- **where today's events end**

Page where it is described _____

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow: _____

Assignment for tomorrow: Pages _____ to _____

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Literature Circles Role Sheet

Vocabulary Enricher*

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Meeting Date _____ Assignment: Pages _____ to _____

Vocabulary Enricher: Your job is to be on the lookout for a few especially important words in today's reading. If you find words that are puzzling or unfamiliar, mark them while you are reading and then later jot down their definition, either from a dictionary or from some other source. You may also run across familiar words that stand out somehow in the reading — words that are repeated a lot, are used in an unusual way, or provide a key to the meaning of the text. Mark these special words, and be ready to point them out to the group. When your circle meets, help members find and discuss these words.

Page No. & Paragraph	Word	Definition	Plan

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow: _____

Assignment for tomorrow: Pages _____ to _____

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Blackline Master

Literature Circles

Daily Literature Study Record

Circle _____

Book _____

Date started _____

Name	Date	Book Brought	Prepared for Discussion	Participated in Discussion	Comments

Literature Circles

Novel Study Self-Evaluation Guide

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Date started _____

I brought my book to class. _____

I read to where I was supposed to each time. _____

I talked about the book in the discussion group. _____

I listened to what other people had to say about the book. _____

I didn't fool around in my group. _____

I used sticky notes to mark places I didn't understand or places I wanted to talk with my group about. _____

I wrote in my reading log and finished any assignment on time. _____

My overall rating of myself is as follows:

I think the person who should get the best grade in my group is _____ because

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Self-Assessment Form

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Date started _____

My Contribution to Group Discussion

Rate each entry as: 1 – Needs Improving, 2 – Satisfactory, or 3 – Very Good

Type of Contribution	Rating	Example
I shared my ideas and offered my suggestions.	1 2 3	
I spoke clearly and slowly enough to be understood.	1 2 3	
I answered others questions.	1 2 3	
I remained on topic and helped the group stay focused.	1 2 3	
I encouraged others to participate.	1 2 3	
I disagreed without hurting others feelings.	1 2 3	
I summarized or repeated my ideas when necessary.	1 2 3	
I gave reasons for opinions.	1 2 3	
I listened courteously and effectively.	1 2 3	
I tried to understand and extend the suggestions of others.	1 2 3	

My most important contribution to the discussion was _____

My plan for improvement is _____

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Literature Circle Evaluation

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Date started _____

Preparation	Student	Teacher
I am prepared for our meetings by consistently doing my preparation work in my notebook.	1 2 3	1 2 3
I am prepared for our meetings by reliably bringing my literature book to class.	1 2 3	1 2 3
I am prepared for our meetings by completing my reading assignments on time.	1 2 3	1 2 3
Participation	Student	Teacher
I participate well in discussions by asking questions of others.	1 2 3	1 2 3
I participate well in discussions by offering my own ideas.	1 2 3	1 2 3
I participate well in discussions by encouraging and respecting others' opinions.	1 2 3	1 2 3
I participate well in discussions by making eye contact with others.	1 2 3	1 2 3
I participate well in discussions by keeping my voice at arm's length (cool, objective).	1 2 3	1 2 3
Comments	Student	Teacher
I am doing my job well.		
Yes, I do this.		
I don't always do this, and I need to improve.		

Literature Circles

Assessment Form for Discussion Groups*

Names _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Date started _____

Groups Discussion Topic or Focus _____

Check the appropriate box. Provide evidence where possible.

	Yes	No	Sometimes	Evidence
Everyone participates and shares in the discussion process. Communication is interactive.				
The group is supportive of its individual members. Group climate promotes friendliness.				
Group members often ask questions for clarification or elaboration.				
The group discussion stays on topic or on directly related issues.				
The group is energetic and enthusiastic.				

What was the best thing about the way this group worked together?

* Saskatchewan Education, *English Language Arts: A Curriculum Guide for the Middle Level* (draft) (Regina: Saskatchewan Education, 1996).

What was one problem the group had?

How did you solve it?

What else might you have done?

What specific plans do you have for improvement?
